

ARLINGTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS

In accordance with the provisions of the Massachusetts General laws, Chapter 30A, Section 20, notice is hereby given for the following meeting of the:

***Arlington School Committee
School Committee Meeting
Monday, December 14, 2015
6:00 PM***

Community Relations Subcommittee Meeting

*Arlington High School
School Committee Room, 6th Floor
869 Mass Avenue
Arlington, MA*

Open Meeting

Approve draft minutes from 11/16/2015 Community Relations Subcommittee

Public Visioning Meeting (25 minutes)

Parent/Teacher Survey on Calendar (20 minutes)

Third Read: Parent Survey Results Summary (5 minutes)

Public Participation

Adjournment

The listings of matters are those reasonably anticipated by the Chair, which may be discussed at the meeting. Not all items listed may in fact be discussed and other items not listed may also be brought up for discussion to the extent permitted by law.

Stated times and time amounts, listed in parenthesis, are the estimated amount of time for that particular agenda item. Actual times may be shorter or longer depending on the time needed to fully explore the topic.

Submitted by Jennifer Susse, Chair of Subcommittee



Town of Arlington, Massachusetts

Approve draft minutes from 11/16/2015 Community Relations Subcommittee

ATTACHMENTS:

Type	File Name	Description
▣ Reference Material	11_16_2016_Community_Relation_Minutes_12_16_draft.docx	11 16 2015 Community Relations Draft Minutes

Community Relations Subcommittee Minutes

Monday, November 16th

Present: SC: Judson Peirce, Cindy Starks, Jennifer Susse
APS: Dr. Kathleen Bodie
Other: Linda Shoemaker

Called to order 5:00 PM

No Public participation.

Ms. Starks made a motion to approve the minutes. Ms. Susse seconded. Starks and Susse approved. Peirce abstained.

Outreach to the Community: January Charrette

Ms. Susse discussed her meeting with Stacie Smith, an Arlington parent who works at Consensus Building Institute, who has graciously offered to help us with the details of our January meeting. We discussed some tentative topics that would be appropriate to bring to a public visioning meeting. They include:

- Importance of neighborhood schools
- Class sizes
- What does a school look like?
- Size of middle schools
- Grade groupings

Ms. Susse offered to contact Patsy Kramer to reserve Town Hall for Thursday, January 7th, with a snow date of Tuesday the 13th and to contact Stacie Smith to see if she is available to come to our next subcommittee meeting.

Survey Responses: Second Read

Mr. Peirce suggested some improvements to the summary, including taking out the “only’s” for areas in which parents have expressed concern. Ms. Starks noted that the complete survey needs to be available to the School Committee before the summary is brought to them. We discussed how to redact the comments, which we agreed should not be public as they sometimes mention specific personnel. We agreed to bring the summary for a third read at our next meeting and bring it before the full school committee in December.

Community Meetings: Discussion and Planning

Ms. Starks presented a proposal for future items that we might want to bring to the community for public discussion. For this academic year we agreed to have a meeting in March or April on *Common Core, Curriculum and Assessments*. Ms. Susse agreed to check with Patsy Kramer about availability on either March 31st or April 8th. We tentatively agreed to hold a meeting on *Budget and Funding* next fall

At the end of the meeting we discussed our upcoming decision on whether to adopt PARCC or MCAS for this Spring. Mr. Peirce expressed concerns that our technology is not “up to par” Ms. Susse worried about adopting a test for one year that will look different from MCAS 2.0. Ms. Starks argued that MCAS is still relevant and does currently reflect the Common Core.

Meeting ended at 6:15 PM



Town of Arlington, Massachusetts

Public Visioning Meeting (25 minutes)

ATTACHMENTS:

Type	File Name	Description
▢ Backup Material	January_Visioning_Meeting_(Task_Force).docx	Jan 7 Public Meeting on Enrollment Challenges

Public Meeting on Enrollment Challenges
January 7th, 7:00-9:00

Draft Annotated Agenda

Meeting Objectives:

- Provide an overview and update on the needs, constraints, and opportunities faced by the town in meeting school enrollment challenges
- Develop a synthesis of community values to help guide planning decisions
- Foster a public exchange of ideas and input on options for addressing enrollment challenges

Agenda:

0:00 Welcome and Introductions

0:10 Overview of Present Conditions, Constraints, and Opportunities

- Presentation
- Clarifying Questions

0:30 Visioning Exercise: What do we value about our schools, buildings, and community?

- Participants write down for themselves what they value most about the schools and the town that they want to ensure is preserved (and/or enhanced) by the solution(s) – 5 mins
- At their tables of 8-10 participants discuss their list, identify their top 3-5 priorities, and write each on a large sticky note, which is then posted in front of the room – 10 mins
- Full group debrief/review/categorization – 15 mins

1:00 Options for Responding to Enrollment Challenges

- Presentation of Option Components
 - Community Input in Small Groups - Major issues are moderated and discussed at fixed spots in the room. Participants, organized by tables, rotate among these issues. Facilitator records *Likes*, *Concerns*, and *Questions* on flip charts. – 40 min.

Some Ideas for Tables

- Clustering Grades
 - Evaluate options such as putting 6th grade in a separate school, putting 5th and 6th together, and bringing 8th grade to the High School.
- Neighborhood Elementary Schools
 - Do we want to prioritize preserving neighborhood elementary schools, or should we put students where we have space?

- Middle School Structure
 - How important is the cluster model? Should we have more than one Middle School? How big should our middle school be?
 - Building Uses
 - Collect thoughts on using/renovating the Gibbs, use of long-term “permanent” modulars, renovating/ rebuilding Parmenter, or building a new school.
 - What Makes a School?
 - Collect thoughts on what we think is essential to a school vs. what is “nice to have”. What size classes are we willing to tolerate?
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- Full group report out. Table moderators present “three things that rose to the top” – 10 min.

1:50 Task Force Process and Next Steps: Task force presents its time-line for deliberations and decision-making, and other opportunities for public input. – 10 min.


2:00 Close



Town of Arlington, Massachusetts

Parent/Teacher Survey on Calendar (20 minutes)

ATTACHMENTS:

Type	File Name	Description
 Backup Material	Schedule_Questions.docx	Potential Questions for Parents

Potential Questions for Parents

Some years, due to snow days and a late Labor Day, students are in school until almost the end of June. Which of the following would you support in order for the school year to end earlier? Indicate your level of support with a number from 1-5, with 1 expressing very strong support for this option, 5 expressing strong dissatisfaction with this option, and 3 being neutral:

- 1) Starting school before Labor Day
- 2) Starting school before Labor Day, when Labor Day occurs after September 4th.
- 3) Cutting into April vacation when snow days push school to the last week of June
- 4) Merging February and April vacation
- 5) Holding school during religious holidays:
 - a. During Rosh Hashanah
 - b. Yom Kippur
 - c. Good Friday
 - d. Christmas Eve

For elementary school aged parents would you be in favor of moving the current half day at the elementary level from Tuesday to another day?

- ☐ Yes, Wednesday
- ☐ Yes, Thursday
- ☐ Yes, Friday
- ☐ I like Tuesday
- ☐ It doesn't matter for our family

The American Academy of Pediatrics recently issued a recommendation that High School start no earlier than 8:30, to allow adolescents to get the sleep that they need. For High School parents would you favor making the High School start time later? Please indicate your level of support with a number from 1-5, with 1 indicating strong support for this option, 5 indicating strong dissatisfaction for this option, and 3 being neutral.



Town of Arlington, Massachusetts

Third Read: Parent Survey Results Summary (5 minutes)

ATTACHMENTS:

Type	File Name	Description
▢ Reference Material	Survey_Results_(2).docx	Survey Results

SURVEY RESPONSES

Last year's 68 question survey produced a dizzying array of data to sort through. We received 1366 responses, representing about 35% of the families in our district. We learned a lot from the survey, both about our district and about the individual schools within our district. Here are some of the district-level highlights.

There were many areas in which parents thought we were doing well. Parents are proud of their children's schools. 76% reported that their school is an "excellent school" that provides a high quality education, 79% report that their child is proud of his/her school. An equal number would recommend their child's school to a friend. Other areas in which we have reason to feel pride include:

Great Teachers and Staff – 87% of parents report that the teachers at their children's school are "enthusiastic about teaching", 85% report that school staff is "courteous and helpful", and 82% of parents report that the school staff is committed to their child's education and responsive to their concerns.

Engaged Parents - Our survey parents are engaged. 94% attend most conferences and open houses and believe that their involvement helps their children. 82% report that there is an active parent association at their child's school, and 83% of OMS and AHS parents regularly check their child's progress online.

Happy Self-reliant Students – 90% of parents say that their child's school encourages students to "be responsible." Students report knowing who to talk to or get help from when needed. Furthermore, over 85% of elementary-school parents, 67% of middle-school parents, and 74% of high-school parents say that their child "enjoys going to school."

Communication – 89% of parents say that they are "kept up-to-date on school activities and events," 78% say that "school information is communicated effectively," and 85% say that they "know how to get school information when they need it." Elementary school parents report getting most of their information from their child and their school's newsletter. Parents at the High School report getting most of their information from the Principal's e-mails. Few parents were interested in receiving information via Twitter or Facebook.

We also observed some areas of challenge. Unsurprising parents with students at the High School, Ottoson, and Stratton reported high levels of dissatisfaction with the facilities at their schools. Many of the areas of dissatisfaction were on issues that are not unique to Arlington. It is not unique to Arlington for parents to feel that their children have too much homework, to worry about bullying, and to be concerned about the level of anxiety that their children are experiencing. Nevertheless, just because Arlington is not unique in these challenges does not mean that we should not take these concerns seriously. Here are some areas of concern.

Homework - While 57% of parents felt that the amount of homework given to their children is "appropriate," 24% felt that it was not. Dissatisfaction is highest at the middle-school level at 41%. However, the overwhelming majority of parents felt that the level of difficulty associated with their child's homework was appropriate.

Anxiety – 20% of parents report that their elementary-aged children experience anxiety. That number jumps to over 40% for middle and H.S. students.

Curriculum Challenges - 26% of parents reported that their school could do more to challenge their child to “his/her full potential”. Middle and High School parents were more likely to say that their child was challenged in math (56%) or ELA (64%) than were elementary school parents. 21% wish their children had more opportunity to “explore areas of interest outside core content areas.”

Parent Understanding and Involvement – 61% of parents report that they understand the academic expectations for their child and 51% of parents report feeling involved in the decisions that affect their child’s education. On both measures dissatisfaction ranged from 15-20% across schools.

Discipline – Although 85% of parents report that their child’s school is a safe environment to learn, over 50% of parents reported that we could do a better job at dealing with student bullying, ensuring that our discipline policy is “fair and effective,” and involving them in the discipline of their children.

Fantasy Question

We also had the opportunity to ask five custom questions. One of the questions was a “fantasy” question, which asked parents how we should spend a fantasy million-dollar windfall from Beacon Hill. At all levels the most popular choice was to add more classroom teachers (27% of parents chose this as one of their top three choices). For Elementary School parents, the second and third most popular choices were split between adding a foreign language in the elementary schools and making the school day longer. Middle School parents wanted more math coaches (17%), increases in technology (15%), and a longer school day (15%). High School parents wanted more math coaches (17%) and increases in technology (16%). Among High School parents 11% chose eliminating sports and music fees as one of their top three choices.

Open Response Comments

Parents generally report high levels of satisfaction with teachers, staff and their community. They characterize their kids as “happy”. The greatest areas of dissatisfaction are with the facilities (mostly at the H.S., OMS and Stratton), homework load and quality, and class sizes.

At the high-school level parents liked the teachers and the community but wanted to “improve the utterly dispiriting facilities”, have smaller classes, a later start time, and more supports for children who are *lost*. Parents also wished for more technology in the classrooms.

At the middle-school level parents wanted better and less crowded facilities, more opportunity for students to move during the day and less punitive grading policies. They also wished teachers were more accessible and approachable.

At the elementary-school level parents are very concerned about class sizes. They want longer lunch and more time for recess, greater focus on project-based and experiential learning, and more challenges for advanced students. 5th grade parents wanted more challenging work in order to better prepare students for middle school.